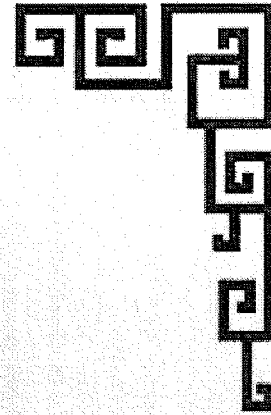
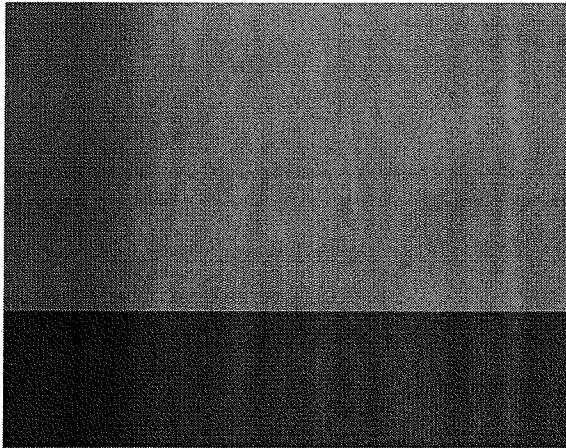


RETOLD BY JULIE LAWSON

THE DRAGON'S PEARL



A MAGIC
PEARL BRINGS
A BOY AND HIS
MOTHER GOOD
LUCK. BUT
THE PEARL
HAS MORE
POWER THAN
THEY KNOW!

Connect to Your Life

Have you ever found something valuable by accident? Tell a partner what happened afterwards.

Key to the Folk Tale

A **folk tale** is a story in which the characters are ordinary people or animals that act like people. The stories usually teach lessons about life. Magic often plays a key role, as it does in *The Dragon's Pearl*.

In Chinese folk tales, dragons are water gods. Each spring they bring life-giving rains to the land. They also reward people who please them and punish those who anger them.

Vocabulary Preview

Words to Know

drought	pierced
scorched	flourished
craved	



Reading Coach CD-ROM selection

FOCUS

Read to learn how a young boy and his mother survive in ancient China.

In the faraway days of cloud-breathing dragons, there lived a boy named Xiao Sheng who loved to sing.

Not that he had much to sing about. He toiled from dawn till dusk cutting grass and selling it for fuel or fodder. In that way, he was able to earn just enough money to buy food for himself and his mother.

fodder
(föd' ər)
food for animals

Still, Xiao Sheng was a good-natured boy.

“Good-bye, Mama,” he said each day. “Who
10 knows what the gods have in store for us. Today may not be the same as yesterday.”

But each day was the same. Off Xiao Sheng would go, thinking how lovely the river looked in the early morning sun. He wished he could fish from its banks or swim in its cool water, but there was never time. With only his song for company, he cut the grass and carried it to the village to sell. At sunset, he made his way home for a bowl of rice, a cup of tea, and a welcome sleep. And each day was the same.

THINK IT THROUGH

What does Xiao Sheng do all day?

FOCUS

Will Xiao Sheng's luck change? Read to find out.

20 Then came a terrible drought. Day after day the sun beat upon the land. Streams no longer sparkled in the hills. The river burned like fire along its scorched banks.

drought
(drout)
n. time of little or no rain

scorched
(skôrcht)
adj. burned on the surface

As always Xiao Sheng sang to lift his spirits, but he was worried. He scanned the sky for a sign of the rain-bringing dragons, but there was never a trace, not even the silkiest wisp of a cloud. Farther and farther into the hills he went, searching for grass that was not shriveled and dead.

REREAD

Why is Xiao Sheng worried?

One day, as he reached the crest of the highest hill, Xiao Sheng gazed upon a splendid patch of rich, green grass. Eagerly he cut the whole patch and hurried to the village, where he sold it for more money than he had ever received before.

When he returned the next day, he discovered the grass had grown back.

“Thank you!” he said, bowing to whatever gods were responsible for his good fortune. Once again he cut the grass and rushed off to the village.

The same thing happened on the third day and on the fourth. Each morning the grass that had been cut had grown back as green and lush as ever.

An idea came to Xiao Sheng. “This must be magic grass,” he said. “And if it grows so well here, why not anywhere? I’ll plant it at home and save myself a long journey each day.”

THINK IT THROUGH

What good luck has Xiao Sheng had? What do you think will happen when he moves the grass?

FOCUS

The boy makes several amazing discoveries. Read to learn what they are.

Next morning he began to dig up the grass, carefully moving the earth and roots to the tiny plot of land beside his hut.

Back and forth he went, digging and transplanting one small bit at a time. He was almost finished when he noticed something shimmering, deep in the earth. He reached for it—and gasped. For in his hand, glowing like a rose-colored sunset, lay a pearl.

transplanting
(trăns plăn' tîng)
moving a plant to
another place

He raced home, crying for joy.
“Mama! See what the gods have

60 given us!”

His old mother beamed.
“This pearl will bring us a
fortune. But let’s keep it for a
while before we lose sight of
its beauty.”

Xiao Sheng agreed, and he
watched his mother hide the
pearl in their near-empty
rice jar. Then he went back
70 to his planting.

“How wonderful it will
be,” he said. “Tomorrow I’ll
cut the grass right here.
Maybe I’ll have time to catch
a fish for supper.”

But it was not to be. Early next morning, Xiao
Sheng rushed outside—only to find that his
grass had withered and died.

withered
(wîth' ərd)
dried up

“What have I done!” he cried. And he
80 cursed himself for disturbing the earth, for
destroying the rich, green grass, for being
too happy and tempting the gods.

In the midst of his tears a thought struck him.

“Perhaps I should have planted the pearl,” he said.
And he dashed off to the rice jar.

What a sight met his eyes! The jar was
now brimming with rice, and on top of
the rice lay the gleaming pearl.

REREAD

Why do you
think the rice
has multiplied?

“A magic pearl!” his mother exclaimed. “Let’s put
90 it in our money box and see what happens.”

They placed the pearl beside the one coin in the
money box, and in no time the box was brimful of gold.

“Ah!” the old woman gasped, running her fingers
through the coins. “You were right, my son. Today is
not the same as yesterday!”

How they rejoiced! Their oil jar overflowed, their
rice jar was never empty, and the money box was
always full. While the neighbors prayed for rain, Xiao
Sheng and his mother sang for joy and blessed their
100 precious pearl.

THINK IT THROUGH

In what way does the pearl change the lives of the boy and
his mother?

FOCUS

Will the pearl continue to bring joy to Xiao Sheng and his
mother?

Their friends were not blind to their good fortune.
Day after day they saw Xiao Sheng playing in the
village or dreaming by the river. He brought home
fish and no longer went into the hills to cut grass. He
had always been a happy boy . . . but now!

“Have you ever seen such a smile?” the villagers
said. “And how well his old mother looks! Surely the
gods have favored these two.”

The villagers were not angry or jealous, because
110 wealth did not make Xiao Sheng and his mother
selfish. They gave generously to everyone
who had shown them kindness in the
past. Their poor drought-stricken
neighbors were thankful.

REREAD

If you were a vil-
lager, how would
you have felt?

Well, most of them.

One night, two men burst into the hut demanding
food and money. "We know you have a box of gold
coins," one rough fellow shouted. "Give it to us at
once." The men pushed the old woman aside and began
120 to tear the hut apart, searching for the money box.

"Stop!" cried Xiao Sheng in alarm. "I'll give you
some money." He pulled the box from its hiding
place, but no sooner had he done so than the bigger
man grabbed it and opened it.

"What have we here!" he bellowed, holding up
the pearl.

Xiao Sheng snatched it from his hand. "You can
have all our money, but you can't have the
pearl."

130 The **ruffian** lunged toward the boy.
Quickly Xiao Sheng popped the pearl into
his mouth. The man grabbed him by the
shoulders and shook him while the other
beat upon his back. "Spit it out!" they yelled. "Spit it
out or it will be the worse for you!"

ruffian
(rūf' ē ən)
tough person

Afraid for her son, the old woman began to wail.
Poor Xiao Sheng was so confused by all the shaking
and shouting that he gulped—and swallowed the pearl!

THINK IT THROUGH

What problem has the pearl caused?

FOCUS

Read to learn what the pearl does to Xiao Sheng.

140 An intense heat seared through him, as if he had
swallowed a ball of fire. He grabbed the teapot and
emptied it in one gulp. Then he rushed to the water
jar. Ten, twenty, thirty cups he drank, trying to put
out the fire. But even after the jar was
empty, he craved more water.

His mother and the two men watched
helplessly as he rushed outside to the
riverbank, threw himself down, and began
to drink.

craved

(krävd')
v. needed very
badly; past tense
of *crave*

"Stop!" his mother begged.

150 But he would not and
could not stop. Before
long, Xiao Sheng had
drunk the river dry.
And still the pearl
burned inside.

The sky darkened and
a fierce wind swept
along the riverbanks.
Lightning crackled. The
160 roar of thunder shook
the earth and made it
tremble. The villagers
clutched one another,
gaping at the blackness
overhead. Xiao Sheng's
mother rushed to his
side and clasped him tightly.

"Come inside," she pleaded.

But even as she spoke, a great change was coming
170 over the boy.

Xiao Sheng began to grow—first his legs, then his body. The scales of a fish rippled along his back and the antlers of a deer appeared on his head.

His hands became the talons of a hawk and his neck stretched like a snake. As he moved, he felt the twisting and coiling of a serpent's tail, and when he opened his mouth, his mother saw the gleaming pearl.

talons
(tāl' ənz)
claws

180 She stared, amazed. In front of her very eyes, her son had become a dragon!

THINK IT THROUGH

In your own words, describe how the boy changes.

FOCUS

Read to see how Xiao Sheng uses his new powers.

Xiao Sheng no longer needed to search for wisps of cloud. Throwing back his mighty head, he breathed cloud after cloud and sent them billowing into the sky. As the villagers watched, the clouds burst open and the rain came streaming down. "It's over!" they cried. "Xiao Sheng has ended the drought!" They raised their smiling faces to the life-giving rain and praised the **beneficent** dragon.

beneficent
(bə nĕf' ĭ sĕnt)
kind

190 Xiao Sheng sang as the rain poured into the thirsty earth and filled up the river. As he turned toward the river, his mother clung to his legs, trying to hold him back. Gently he freed himself from her grasp. Again and again she flung herself upon him. Again and again he set himself free.

Into the river he went, but his mother's cries pierced his heart and he could not keep from looking back. Each time he turned, his massive body cut into the river's edge, **sculpting** the banks with his last farewell.

pierced
(pĭrst)
v. touched deeply; past tense of *pierce*

200 Alone by the river, the mother of Xiao Sheng wept as her son disappeared beneath the surface of the water. And still the rain poured down, washing away her tears.

sculpting
(skŭlp' tĭng)
shaping

The villagers were kind to Xiao Sheng's mother and honored her as they honored her son. Each morning they tossed a few grains of rice into the river as a gift to Xiao Sheng, Most Honored and Precious Dragon.

210 Every evening his mother sat on the riverbank, giving him the news of the day. She told him how the crops flourished and

flourished
(flŭr' ĭsht)
v. grew very well; past tense of *flourish*

how lush the countryside was, now that the drought was over. She spoke of the strange manner in which the rain fell—how it poured on all the fields except on those of the two wicked men. Those men finally left their dry, barren land in disgrace and were never seen again.

Sometimes a dragonfly landed softly on
220 her shoulder, or a bright orange carp
splashed its tail right at her feet. This made

carp
(kärp)
large fish

her smile, for she knew these to be glimpses of her son. And sometimes when the waters lapped the shore she could hear a light, tinkling sound, as clear and bright as the jingling of golden coins. This, too, made her smile, for she knew she had heard Xiao Sheng singing, "Today is not the same as yesterday."

As long as she lived, she watched for him every spring when dragons rise up from the rivers and
230 breathe clouds to rain upon the earth.

Today in China, the River Min still flows through the province of Szechuan. If you stop by that river to watch sunlight dance upon the water, you will see the banks carved by the dragon's tail.

And if you listen very carefully to the rippling of the water, you may even hear the dragon singing.

THINK IT THROUGH

1. How does the dragon end the drought?
2. How does the boy show his mother that he still cares for her?
3. What powers does the pearl seem to have?
4. Do you think that in this story all the good people are rewarded and all the bad ones punished? Why or why not?